



## **The ADA 20 Years Later: The 2010 Survey of Americans With Disabilities**

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During the summer of 2010, celebrations around the nation marked the 20th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). On July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed this Act into law, protecting the civil rights of the largest minority in the United States: people with disabilities. Now that these celebrations are part of history, too, we need to assess what has been accomplished and what remains to be done.

To evaluate the impact of the ADA, Kessler Foundation and the National Organization on Disability (NOD) commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a new poll: The 2010 Survey of Americans With Disabilities (1). The new data were compared with those from surveys conducted over the past 24 years, measuring the gaps in experiences and attitudes between people with and without disabilities. The survey solicited feedback in 10 important areas: employment, income, education, health care, access to transportation, socializing, going to restaurants, attendance at religious services, political participation, and life satisfaction. This survey also featured 3 new indicators: technology use, access to mental health services, and overall financial situation. While modest improvement occurred in a few areas, in general, most indicators showed little or no change (complete survey data are available at [www.2010DisabilitySurveys.org](http://www.2010DisabilitySurveys.org)).

Education and political participation were the two areas where the gaps have narrowed. Employment, however, remains responsible for the largest gap between people with and without disabilities. Among working-age people with disabilities, only 21% reported working either full- or part-time, compared with 59% of people without disabilities—a gap of 38 percentage points. This gap has decreased since it was first examined (from 43% in 1998), but it remains large and its decline has been slow. Moreover, this persistent gap impedes progress in other key areas for people with disabilities, such as income, access to health care, and socialization.

The second largest gap was in a new indicator, Internet usage—85% vs 54% for people with disabilities, a difference of 31 points. This was followed by indicators of lower income and greater financial struggles among people with disabilities.

Over the past 2 decades, we have seen gains in public awareness and access for people with disabilities, as well as advances in medical care and rehabilitation. These survey findings show that much still needs to be done to ensure that these gains translate into improvement in areas that contribute to life satisfaction. Clearly, passage of legislation is just the first step toward ensuring equal rights. As with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legislation needs public support to achieve its goal.

On July 26, President Obama set an example with his executive order establishing “the federal government as a model employer of individuals with disabilities” (2). This is an important step toward a national effort to expand employment opportunities for the country’s largest minority. To narrow the gaps that have persisted for 20 years, cooperative efforts from disability organizations, the business community, and government will be required. On the national level, we need to promote the talents of people with disabilities, reinforce their value in the workplace, and expand our networks with employers to ensure that a diverse workplace includes people with disabilities.

### **REFERENCES**

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2. Obama B. Executive Order: Increasing federal employment of individuals with disabilities. July 26, 2010. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-increasing-federal-employment-individuals-with-disabilities>. Accessed Sept 9, 2010.

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